

Traveling to Canada or Mexico anytime soon? Beginning January 31st, you may need additional documentation to get back into the United States. The change is the result of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which was approved by Congress to enhance security at our nation's borders. The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative is designed to improve national security by strengthening identification requirements for Americans traveling to Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, and the Caribbean.

Starting last year, passports were required for Americans traveling by air between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, and the Caribbean. Now the next phase of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative will go into effect. Beginning, January 31, 2008, U.S. citizens will be required to present a government-issued photo ID plus proof of United States citizenship. For example, a U.S. passport or the combination of a driver's license plus a birth certificate would meet this requirement. When the final phase of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative goes into effect possibly as early as this summer, only a passport or one of a short list of other approved documents will be accepted for reentry into the United States.

If you do not have the necessary documents available, what can you do? The simplest option is to apply for a United States passport and your representatives in Congress are available to help. Currently, processing times for passports are approximately four to six weeks. If you have any questions or require assistance, please do not hesitate to call your representative in Congress. You can also find more information online by visiting the Department of State's website at www.travel.state.gov or the Department of Homeland Security's website at www.dhs.gov.

While I understand that these new travel requirements are an inconvenience for many people in Southern California, rest assured my colleagues and I in Congress are here to help make the transition as seamless as possible.

GARY G. MILLER
Member of Congress